

University of Pennsylvania

Essay

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Menstruation

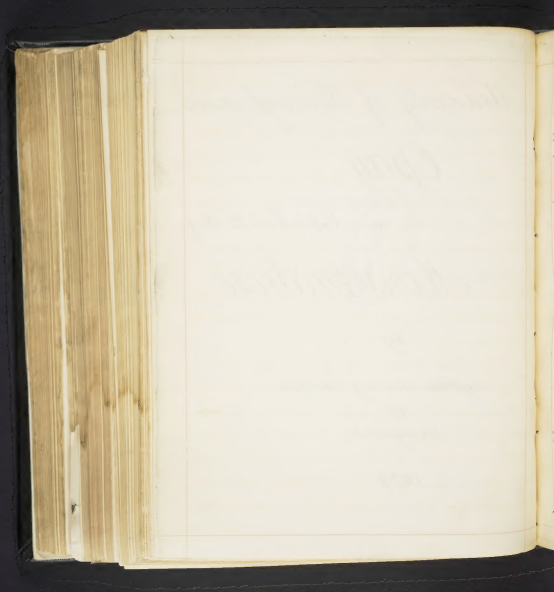
by

Lyttleton Murray Robertson

of

Maryland

1829



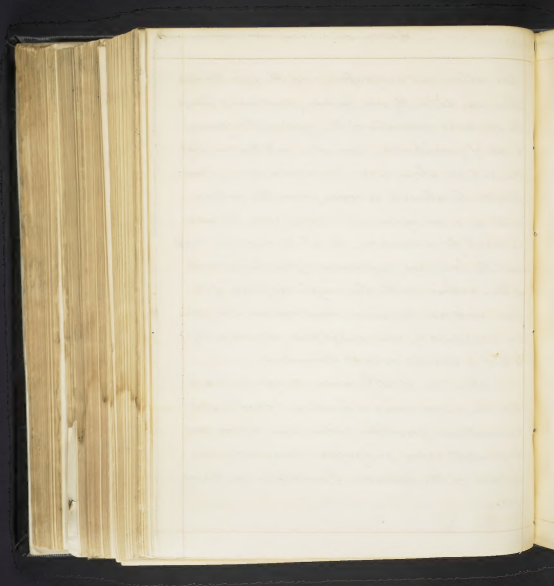
In unison with those who have written on this subject, I shall define the menses to be, discharge of a coloured fluid, occurring every twenty eighth day or lunar month, from the Pubescent state unto the forty-fifth or fiftieth year; unless interrupted by pregnancy, its consequences, or disease. As there is no longer any contention relative to the organ from whence it is derived, yet a variety of opinions exists, whether it comes from the veins, the arteries, or a peculiar set of vessels adapted to that purpose, and further whether it be a secretion or blood.

Why those persons are disposed to receive Dr. William Hunter's and Morgagni's opinion only in part on this subject, I cannot imagine, for it appears to me that if they allow those Gentlemen to be correct in the one case, they must in the other. Dr. Hunter's character for veracity is unimpeached, for acuteness of



observation not surpassed, and He says this secretion, was distinctly seen by him, percolating through the contorted extremities of the vessels of the uterus, in a case of puerperia; now it is well known that the arteries alone have this appearance, it must therefore be allowed to come from the arteries, and as a consequence, if it comes from the arteries, it must be a secretion, for all the secretions throughout the body are performed after this manner by the arteries, with the single exception of the Liver, and even the veins which execute this office are considered by some enlightened physiologists, to be of a decided arterial character.

As it is of little moment, who first suggested the menses being a secretion, I shall pass it over without further notice and address such arguments as my judgement may direct, in support of the opinion I entertain on this subject.



Does the appearance of this fluid offer no proof of its being a secretion? if so why does it not possess the common properties of the mass of blood as it circulates in the general system? that it is deficient in some of these is admitted by all held to be induced and consequently if wanting in these constituents it cannot be blood although eliminated from it.

What are the physical properties of this fluid, and what bearing will they have on the present question? First its colour is intermediate to that of venous and arterial blood, ~~secondly~~ Secondly its never separating into the elemental parts of blood however long exposed to the atmosphere, Thirdly its not coagulating even when kept for years, And fourthly its not acting on the putrefactive process as has been proved by cases of imperforate Hymen.

It has been stated in the definition of this secretion,





that it is in the first place elaborated at puberty, or in other words that it is the proximate effect of this state, for whatever may be said to the contrary, no woman has ever been fruit-ful without menstruating, although it may have been somewhat modified in appearance and colour.

The time when this fluid is first elaborated is in a great degree controlled by climate, constitution, &c. varying from the month to the twentieth year as it may be the lot of the female to inhabit the frigid northern or the more genial southern climate; sooner in cities where relaxing luxury dwells, than in the rural cot of reason's town - period joys.

The evolution which at this time takes place is peculiarly interesting to the physician, artist, and philosopher, who accustomed to admire, and scan nature's works, beholds how admirably



she adapts her measures to the necessary elements for  
all these changes. Suddenly the appearance of the  
female undergoes a change, which is better un-  
derstood than can properly be explained; she  
looks like quite a new being, fresh from the hands  
of a skilful Sculptor! with her voice more im-  
mediately full and in fact her whole countenance  
expressive of womanhood, so far as the indivi-  
dual may be susceptible of that state.

Whilst these mutations in the corporeal  
system are going on the mind is not station-  
ary, the amusements of the boyhood are now  
thrown aside, and reason assumes her empire.

The other signs indicating the approach  
of this interesting period are heart-ach, swelling  
of the eyes, pains in the pectoral region, listless-  
ness, chimerical appetites, slight haemorrhoea,  
itching sensation in the mammae, which  
may continue for an indefinite period,



subsequently a discharge takes place, more or less, and the source of which is not necessarily, or between that of venous and arterial blood.

The continuation of this discharge is generally speaking, from four to six days, and recurs with great regularity, every twenty-eight day, from the time of the ovulation.

While the flow lasts the appearance is sanguine, pale, or flushed, with a disagreeable dragging sensation about the hips and lumbar region.

After this manner are the various parts of the ovulation subject to this discharge, until the period, or periodical year, when it becomes irregular as to time and quantity, and finally ceases to recur no more.

The course of this secretion, says some, is a continuation of the same, and in some cases, yet is given. I am now said, so far that these years no further, it does once his inseparable



is impossible, but cordly man not content  
with beholding objects, ~~without~~ out a knowledge of  
their causes, has framed a variety of opinions  
in account for that, the knowledge of which  
would avail him naught.

I will take a cursory <sup>new</sup> of some of these ~~new~~  
causes which have been thought all sufficient to induce  
this discharge; the first that arrests my attention  
is that of Lunar influence; the effect which this  
changing luminary has upon the tides, first  
attracted the attention of the author of this  
hypothesis, which has no other basis than the  
periodicity which this secretion observes, so nat-  
ter to the winds this reasoning, it is but necessary  
to state that which the un-ignorant are acquain-  
ted with, which is that women are menstruating,  
on every day, and hour, throughout the year.

The doctrine of general plethora has  
much greater claims to our considerations.





Although this hypothesis is much more plausible than the one just mentioned, I hope to prove it to be what in my belief it is, the baseless fabric of a vision, with no other support <sup>than</sup> that which it derives from the inventive genius of its author.

For argument we will, for a moment admit what has been routinely asserted by this theorist that women are more disposed to plethoria than men, what tendency, will this have? how will this substantiate what he so anxiously wishes? is plethoria temporarily removed by hemorrhage, or is it not more frequently, relieved by a temporary evacuation? the secretions, he rather declines to admit are the correct one, I think, if it is not why do we see women return almost to stasis from his plethoric state without the help of a single drop of blood, by the increased increase in some of these secretory functions. Moreover, would not the great plethoric gout



things have committed a weak & ~~supererogation~~  
in making her so, I think it, yet this he never  
does, every thing is in responsive harm, every  
thing has its adaptation to a peculiar end,  
from the simple functions of the zoophyte, up  
to those of more complex nature.

Again, if the plethoric state is the cause of the  
function, and is constantly present, why does  
not menstruation prevent the discharge? —  
is in epistaxis and other hemorrhages, on the  
contrary, it is well known that depletion carries  
to a proper extent is in many instances, it is absolutely  
necessary, as a preventive of it in suppression &c.

If I may be permitted to theorise I am  
willing to allow there may be more blood  
in the system of women during gestation  
than in the absence of that state, and think  
I can give some reasons as plausible as those  
brought forward by the Author of this doctrine.



in proof of its existence, I do positively deny its  
necessity either prior or subsequent to the period.

It is, I apprehend to every one, that women  
are of a more full habit of body during the period  
of pregnancy than at any other, consequently must  
have a greater quantity of fluids circulating  
in their system. Now if there is an increase of  
the contained fluid there must be an increase in  
the caliber of the containing vessels, consequent-  
ly, if this increase occurs there must be a dilata-  
tion in the coats of these vessels, which, owing  
to their elasticity, admit of it without detriment  
to a certain degree, the necessity of this increased  
quantity, ceasing to obtain the vessels contract  
to their pristine size. So much may possibly  
be correct, I do not pretend to say that it positively  
is, we at least know it to be the case so far as re-  
lates to the uterine vessels, or how is the increase  
of blood contained in this organ without the



proportionable augmentation, of their selfish in volume.

The final cause so far as human agency may be concerned in this arcana of nature (being absolutely requisite to the reproduction of the species as has been proved) may be hidden from our ken for some wise purpose whatever this may be I shall not attempt to develop, but shall merely state my opinion, by a few analogies, and comparisons, which I hope may not be thought misplaced.

When hunger exists the salivary glands are stimulated to action, or in other words to pour out the saliva, even by the expectation of food, to what is this owing if not to the sympathies reciprocally existing, between the brain, stomach and these glands? When food is taken into the stomach it is stimulated (or whatever name you may choose to give it) into action, and what

Handwritten text in a cursive script, likely from a 17th or 18th-century manuscript. The text is arranged in approximately 20 horizontal lines across the page. The ink is dark, and the paper is aged and slightly discolored. The handwriting is fluid and characteristic of the period.



phenomena have you, the pouring-out of the gastric juice mucus &c. what are these fluids? they certainly are not blood, neither is the stomach a gland, yet no one can deny it a secretory power; these are its physiological functions.

I might go on with such analogies with the liver, the kidney, and in fact with every viscus it would hold good with all, what does this go to prove but that each organ has its peculiar stimulus to the impression of which it is susceptible in the exact proportion to the development of the organ in question. The application of this reasoning is obvious, the evolution of the nations takes place like that of other organs, consequently is susceptible of the full impression of its natural stimulus this acting is productive of ministration—

Yet whither I! where has my subject borne me! far far beyond my depth or rather into a labyrinth I cannot retrace and through which I dare not proceed!

James